

DOCTOR AND PATIENT.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS.

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"against such a course." He knew that he was a man of a different kind, a better man, more worthy, and selfless fellow, and he had strong reasons for hoping that his succession to Mr. Fletcher's name might not be a disadvantage. The old man, however, declined to talk that evening. He turned himself round to face Mattland and said: "Who is Amy Fletcher?"

"She is the daughter of the Kestertons."

"Why? Who got her the place?"

"I did," replied Mattland, looking rather puzzled.

"If it seem to take a considerable interest in this young lady. Has she any money?"

"None whatever."

"Then who paid for her schooling?"

"Her father left enough to cover most of the expenses."

"And you supplied the rest?"

Mattland's look was sufficient to condemn him.

"It's a nice, romantic story," continued the old man; "when do you propose to marry her?"

"I don't know," replied the young doctor "perhaps not at all."

"You mean she doesn't care for you?"

"No, I don't mean that; but I am in a very peculiar position with regard to her."

"What is the peculiarity?"

"Do you ask me to tell you?"

"Yes, I do."

"I didn't like to do so without your asking me directly. I have reason to believe that she is not a very good girl."

"I don't see why that should stop you."

"No, perhaps not; though people would doubt my sincerity in proposing to a girl so young."

"You are not sincere?"

"It's very odd that an heiress should be so foolish."

"You can't know who she is," explained Mattland. "I am the only one in the world who does know. Suppose that I ask her hand, she may accept me; afterward she will find out that I am deceiving her, and will think of me then? She will judge me to be the most despicable man in the world."

"You are not sincere, then?"

"No, I am not. If she loves you, the fact that she is rich will only add to her willingness to accept you."

"You cannot tell her, because she may never be so."

Mr. Fletcher looked puzzled. "There is a great deal to be told," Mattland said. "You've treated me very well. I have a liking for you, and for the girl, too, for the doctor. I should like to help you if I can, and I am sure you would be glad to get rid of me if I have no power to do any. How did you come to have this girl on your hands?"

"I was not a very good man, as you well know. They died abroad within a few months of each other. I was only a very young man when they died, and I was left with a fortune in charge of their only daughter, before she was more than an infant. My mother brought her up, when she was old enough she was married to a man who was a fortune hunter."

"This simple recital interested the old man more than he seemed to show. He could not help exclaiming, "What a tragedy as he said, "is her grandfather's life?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"How does he not enjoy her?"

"He is not the subject of her existence. He quarreled with his son, who went abroad and died there, telling me never to let his father know of his existence. I have kept the secret till now."

"You may as well finish the story, now you have gone so far," said the invalid, faintly leaning on his chair. "What was her father's name?"

"Charles Fletcher."

"What was his father's name?"

"Yes, your son."

"Then Amy is my grandchild?"

Mattland assented.

"You will not let me know it?"

"No; she is not aware of the existence of any relatives. Your son made me promise to keep the secret, and I am bound to keep it. I shall never tell her."

"That will do for to-night. I am tired and excited; my head aches abominably. I will go to bed."

Mattland came down stairs as soon as he had seen his patient attended to. He took a long walk, and then he determined to take a stroll in the cool evening air. His object had been accomplished; he had made known to his patient the existence of his grandchild, and he had done so without his expectations? If so, what would it be to his duty to do?

"It is a revolting matter in his mind, trying to look at it dispassionately as an outsider and failing miserably, when he looks at it as a doctor."

"Hello, Mattland, I don't I recognize you. Gorgeous night, isn't it? Are you in a hurry?"

"I shall get back soon," was the reply.

"I'll walk with you, if you don't mind. The truth is I've something very important to tell you, and I must have a little conversation."

"Well?" replied Mattland.

"You know that Miss Fletcher, who is companion or something at the Kestertons' is the daughter of my son? Now she has suddenly and somehow happened to ask her father of her father. You might have knocked me down with a hammer, and I don't wonder she told me it was Charles Fletcher. You know who he was, I suppose?"

"Mr. Fletcher's son?"

"Yes, that's right. Now, you know I've always supposed myself the only rival of the old boy has, and he has told me time and time again to tell you that. Now my nephew made his will, I shall be in a hole, for everything will go to this girl."

"She doesn't know about it, does she?"

"No, she doesn't. No one knows but ourselves."

"Why have you confided in me?" asked Mattland.

"There you are, you see," exclaimed Dexter. "I hadn't decided whether to tell you or not, when suddenly you appeared before me, and that settled it. It seemed providential."

"That scarcely a sufficient reason for your acting as you do."

"No; by Jove! you're right. To tell the truth for once, I wanted to find out if the old boy has made a will, and I thought you might be able to tell me. I don't want to strack me it was quite possible you might discover the secret without my help, and then I should have to tell the Kestertons as acquainted with this girl."

"I've known it a long time."

"Have you, I thought?"

"Yes, I have. I thought you might be right, and my uncle knew that Charlie is a child."

"No; he wished it to be kept secret."

"I would have told you, but I wanted some deliberation. I'm not so safe as I should like to be. It seems to me I've only one chance, and that is to tell you the whole thing turning out right."

"What is that?"

"The matter."

Mattland gave a start. "Pretty Amy?"

"Repeated."

"Yes. Why not? I must get engaged as soon as possible. I want to know, if he has left me his property, can I breathe a word of engagement? I mean without his difficulty; and if she gets it all for want of a will, and she is not a girl, I shall be in a hole. I'm showing my confidence in you in telling you my plans before-hand, as I take it that you are the only person I can trust. I don't suffer my uncle's death, unless he leaves everything to me by will."

"You are quite right," replied Mattland, still in a state of confusion. He had not had need of it all to restrain himself. It certainly was his intention to let her know the whole thing, and he was glad of her at once, in order that she may have opportunity of urging her claim."

"Oh, confound it all, Mattland, will you be good enough to tell me what you intend for a time at any rate. Give a fellow a chance. You see, as it is, I am in a position to make a very good arrangement, and she's only a poor creature, but reverse our positions, and where's my chance? No, you must let matters stand if you can."

"I won't promise anything now," replied Mattland. "I shall see you to-morrow, as usual, and then I will tell you."

He turned away without even saying good night. Dexter was such a mixture of a pure good nature and selfishness, he had no idea of taking him into his confidence and making him a sort of partner in his disgraceful plans, that Mattland was disgusted with him, and he was glad to get away. He was his rival for Amy! And his own hand was tied!

He only after an almost sleepless night. He realized that his patient was no sort, evidently the result of want of rest. He made no allusion to the events of the previous day.

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